

PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL & INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE BEIRUT PORT BLAST RESPONSE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The unprecedented explosion of the Beirut Port on August 4, 2020 was met with a prompt humanitarian intervention by local, national civil society, and international organizations. Because of the intensity of the intervention deployed in a short time window in densely populated areas, many obstacles, including issues related to coordination among organizations and with the government, access mechanisms to the affected areas, as well as meager resources versus dire socioeconomic needs, raised questions about the efficiency of the intervention. Quite expectedly, issues of fairness and equity in the humanitarian aid were unveiled, especially in poverty-stricken neighborhoods.

This policy brief furnishes grounded data on the humanitarian intervention in the immediate aftermath of the Beirut Port blast drawing on the lived experiences of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), affected women, and humanitarian workers. As consultants commissioned by ActionAid, we refract our analysis on contributing to transforming the humanitarian system in Lebanon into a fairer and more transparent one utilizing lessons learned from the intervention.

The research adopts a Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) because it provides a participatory space that promotes women's voice and advocates for inclusion and equal rights. Data collection took place during the period of 1 February -29 March 2021. It involved CSOs of varied backgrounds, humanitarian workers, and women recruited from Mdawar, Khandaq el Ghamiq, Zuqaq el-Blat, Sin el- Fil, Gemmayze, Bourj Hammoud, and Bechara El-Khoury. Data were collected from structured interviews conducted online with 12 participants representing 8 CSOs, Focus Groups (FGs) conducted face-to-face with 10 affected women and 3 humanitarian workers, discourse analysis of CSOs websites, and secondary sources. Interviews were thematically coded using the qualitative data analysis and research software, Atlasi.ti.

Affected women and humanitarian workers accented the role of CSOs in mitigating the dire socioeconomic needs of vulnerable communities that predated the explosion due to protracted government's neglect. CSOs coordinated with many constituencies including the army and municipalities to identify needs and access affected areas. The coordination was tactical rather than strategic premised on a national humanitarian framework. Bureaucracy and overlaps in humanitarian service provision were among the reasons for the delayed intervention. Further, humanitarian workers and affected women lamented incidents of favoritism and discrimination that rendered the intervention partly non-inclusive. Some women reported instances of humiliation by some humanitarian workers, voiced concerns about false promises of aid provision, and casted doubt on 'parasite organizations. Further, incidents of harassment against humanitarian workers were reported. Humanitarian aid in one area was deployed along a vector of sectarianism, manifesting solidarity among cross-border coreligionists. Earmarked funds distributed by affluent Lebanese to help chosen areas raised questions about fairness in the humanitarian space.

This policy brief concludes with evidence-driven policy recommendations to UN agencies, INGOs, local, and national NGOs. It also accounts for policy formulation aimed at promoting fairness in the humanitarian space as well as providing sustainable development opportunities for the marginalized, particularly women.